

6:Ch'en

E-5 (no date)1942

AE5 MiaoAES

000 RELIGIOUS BELIEFS OF THE MIAO AND I
TRIBES IN AN-SHUN, KWEICHOW

By

Ch'en Kuo-chün

Translated by

Lien-en Tsao

Pien-cheng Kung-lun /Frontier Affairs/, Vol. 1,
No. 7, 8 (March 10, 1942), pp. 88-92

Bj 1a
P59
1

[P.i]

Religious Beliefs of the Miao and I
Tribes in An-shun, Kweichow

An-shun is a center of the Miao and I tribes in Kweichow province, where there are two Miao tribes, the Ch'ing /green/ Miao and the Hua /flower/ Miao, and one I tribe, the Chung-chia. Although there are various groups of Miao-I with different customs, from the point of view of religious beliefs they are all polytheists. In recent decades due to contacts with the Chinese people a portion of the Chung-chia have been assimilated. Besides setting up family altars and worshipping ancestors, they believe in Kuan-yin /goddess of mercy/, Confucius, Kuan-kung /a deified hero of the 3rd century, sometimes called the god of war/ and other gods. The Catholics and the Protestants have also exerted in recent years a strong latent influence on the Miao and I villagers.

The following is a brief study of the religious development and beliefs of the Miao-I tribes.

/89/ The Catholic church in the city of An-shun is known as Shan-tsung T'ang /hall of goodness/ with four branch halls at Kung-pu, Mo-wan-tung, Shui-tang-chai and Ch'iu-chow. They all hold properties which are yearly on the increase. It is said that the Catholic Church at An-shun was established by a certain French priest some fifty years ago. Today, it is administered by Lengkuohsien /transliterated/ and Chailiszu /transliterated/, both French, and the expenses for maintaining it comes from the Catholic headquarters in Kweiyang. The church maintains an elementary school, studying chiefly the Bible, and the enrollment is about from 30 to 40 boys from Catholic families. Within the hsien district there are about 2000 Catholics, one-half of them being the Chung-chia people.

[101]
771

797

[162]

797 They are mostly converted to the faith because
427 they are tenant farmers on the land owned by the church. This land, also known as the "bible-hall land", is scattered over a number of localities that border on the Chung-chia villages. The profits from the land are equally divided. The advantages for tenant farmers being more than elsewhere, many Chung-chia people become believers in order to cultivate the church land. Every Sunday the farmers attend mass in nearby churches. During harvest time in October the church would send out priests to the villages to supervise harvests, where they also conduct religious services morning and night, requiring all believers to attend (some of the villages have small churches). The priest remains in each village for about a week, putting up with the richest family, but the expenses on food are borne by all the tenant farmers in the village. In recent years this relationship is undergoing a change as it is said that the priests have indulged in extortions which have greatly shaken the faith of the Miao-I believers.

797 Besides Catholics there are Protestants within the district. The China Inland Mission maintains a Gospel Church in An-shun. It was established in 1897 by an American missionary, Tanchüshih /transliterated/, who went deep into the Miao villages in many areas. His friendli-

[162] ness and sincerity won him many converts. At present there are in this hsien area from 5000 to 6000 Christians, both Chinese and Miao-I.

792 The missionary was especially successful among
797 the Hua Miao, and there are more Christians among this tribe than among others. The leader of the Hua Miao in An-shun was Yang Ching-an, who was trained by Tanchüshih. In the early years of the Chinese Republic, Yang had followed the American missionary to Shanghai and Nanking. With his extensive experience he was considered

an enlightened person among the Miao. His religious fervor, however, was a little too excessive, and it disqualified him as a true leader of his people. He preached among them for more than twenty years with great success, but since he and his foreign associates had left the church, no one succeeded them as a full time preacher. The church school has been closed down. There are only two American doctors in the hospital, having charge at the same time of the church, but they have no time for preaching. So the faith of the Miao and I in Protestant Christianity is also on the decline. 797
792

Besides the Catholic Church and the China Inland Mission, the Seventh Day Adventists have recently established a church in An-shun to spread the Christian principles but rather on a small scale. At present the work is carried on by a young man of the Hua Miao tribe, named Tang Chen-ying, with about thirty members equally divided among the Chinese and Miao-I, and a church school of over ten Miao children.

The Miao and I in An-shun are largely uneducated and superstitious, believing strongly in ghosts and evil spirits. All their daily and farm activities, trading, sickness, marriage and funeral events are subject to the influences of the spirits. 771
181

The following are some examples:

(1) Spiritual Media. The names for spiritual media in An-shun are the same in the Miao-I language as in the Chinese. The men are known as Kwei-shih or Tuan-kung; the women, Mi-la or Mi-pu. Their duty is to sacrifice to the spirits to invoke their aid and to provide a medium between the spiritual and the human worlds. As such they are respected by the people. All ancestor worship and funeral events have to be presided over by the Kwei-shih. Every 791

791 Miao-I center has one or two Kwei-shih, who learned their trade since childhood. Among the Chung-chia people the magic charms used for such [212] spiritual purposes are marked with Chinese characters as phonetic symbols and written down as a scripture to be transmitted from master to disciple. The Kwei-shih, who are farmers by trade, take up mediumship as a side line to supplement their income from remunerations gained [753] from its practice. In case of sickness the 791 Miao-I believe the evil spirits are causing 462 trouble, and it is the duty of the Mi-la to chase them away in order to cure the sick person. Often she is invited to the house to do her work. Sometimes in public gatherings the Mi-la is surrounded by people inquiring from her as to the best method of driving away spirits. Evidently the Mi-la is less able than the Kwei-shih, for in case of very serious illness or in the performance of funeral rites the man medium is always preferred.

(2) Spirits of ailment. The Miao-I's belief in spirits is so strong that in case of ailment they neither think of a doctor nor of medicine, but of the Mi-la alone. She is generally an old woman, and on arriving at the house she is immediately possessed by the divinity she has invoked. The latter would reveal to her the identity of the evil spirit and devise /90/ the means to be extricated from it. There are many kinds of evil spirits, and the measures to ward them off also vary.

As a result of our investigation, we are able to list the names of the spirits and their antidotes:

- 776
755 1. The Family Spirit. The disembodied spirit of a departed person of the same tribe, when met on the road, would give serious stomach-ache. The antidote is to take a bowl of rice filled with water, and twelve sheets of

paper money placed on a sieve, and to carry them outside the village gate to be discarded on the ground. Then the sick person will recover immediately.

776
755

2. The Shrinking Head Spirit. When one meets this spirit on a mountain slope, one acquires a terrible headache; the antidote is to throw a bowl of rice with water at the village gate.

3. The Wealth Wasting Hundred Blessing Spirit. This spirit when encountered causes a person to vomit; the antidote is the same as for the Shrinking Head Spirit.

4. The Nine Worms Spirit. When a man gets this spirit he would feel cold all over his body and would vomit. To cure this sickness one has to make an effigy of a worm with paper and rice straw and leave it at the intersection of three roads outside the village.

5. The Drowning Spirit. When one meets this spirit one gets a terrible stomach-ache. In order to get cured one takes a bowl of rice with water, plants a burning incense in it and leaves it on the road outside the village.

6. The Suspended Spirit. This spirit gives one pain in the heart and stomach; the cure for this sickness is the same as that for the shrinking head spirit.

7. The Wolf Dog Spirit. If one has a severe stomach-ache while working in the field, he must have encountered this spirit. The method of cure is to knead a ball of clay into the shape of a dog to be discarded by the sick man at a distant place.

8. The Headless Spirit. If a child cries without stop at the intersection of three roads, he must have seen a headless ghost. To stop the child crying, take a bowl of water, place a bamboo leaf in it, and leave it at the junction.

776
755 9. The Eagle Spirit. If someone feels weak and painful all over the body while walking outside the village or in the field, you can take a small chicken, circle it around the sick person's head a few times, and then send it to a distant place. He will soon get well.

10. The Dragon Tail Spirit. If walking in the field one finds great pain in one's legs, it is because this spirit is giving trouble. Make a flag out of a piece of flower paper and walk with it around the field, and the pain in the leg will cease.

11. The Tree Spirit. Meeting this spirit gives one pain all over the body. To cure this illness take a piece of good meat, a cup of tea and a bowl of rice to the tree spirit in the village. After the sacrifice the sickness will be cured.

12. The Buffalo Spirit. When one meets this spirit one has a swollen stomach. Take a bowl of ashes from wheat husk and scatter it outside the village.

13. The Earth Spirit. One vomits after meeting this spirit, and the method of cure is the same as that for the sickness caused by the buffalo spirit.

14. The Wine Spirit. This spirit gives a person giddiness, and to get rid of him one burns three pieces of paper money outside the house.

15. The Mother Pig Spirit. Meeting this spirit one feels feverish all over the body. Take a pair of candles and several sticks of incense, stick them up beside the door, and this spirit will go away.

776
796 (3) The Village God. After the spring sacrifice to the tree god the Miao and I people within the hsien district would chop off a piece of wood to make a pair of idols to be placed in front of the village gate, or sometimes in a low

house erected for the god for the special purpose of guarding the village gate, such as the Chinese earth buddha. This is known among the Miao-I as the village god who maintains peace and security for the entire population of the village. Every sixth day of the sixth moon the village makes a public sacrifice to this god. 776
776

(4) The Tree God. The Miao-I people always plant trees at the back of their village. The woods thus formed is known as the "Rear Dragon", and there the biggest tree is chosen as the tree god. The villagers dare not touch a blade of grass or a twig of wood in the woods. If inadvertently one picks up something and becomes sick, one is said to have offended the tree god. Every year on the head-dragon day of the second moon the villagers would build a straw pavilion before the tree god as an altar for sacrifice, and the sacrificial ritual is led by the Kwei-shih. All villagers participate in the ceremony, bringing meat and rice as gifts.

/91/ (5) The Buffalo King and the Horse King. Near the larger Miao-I villages in the hsien area there are low huts built for the buffalo king and the horse king, whom the Miao-I worship diligently because they look after the welfare of the cattle in the village. The eleventh day of the tenth moon is set aside for the worship of the buffalo king; and the twenty-third day of the sixth moon, for the horse king. The sacrifice is made with a cock and a pig's head. If there is sickness among the cattle in the village, then the cure is effected by sacrificing good meat, paper and candles before the respective gods.

(6) The Spirit Tablet. The Miao-I have adopted the Chinese custom of ancestral worship, placing in the family hall, no matter how small and ugly, a wooden tablet, on which are pasted words such as "the Seat of the Heaven and Earth Lord", "So-and-so's Ancestral Seat", and others. 769

000 Lord", "So-and-so's Ancestral Seat", and others.

796 (7) Sweeping the Village. The Hua Miao and the Ch'ing Miao every year stage a village sweeping ceremony, the idea being to avoid sickness and disaster during the year. The conditions and rituals of the two being different, they are separately described as follows:

796 (A) Village Sweeping of the Hua Miao. Every
791 year on the head dragon day of the second moon, the Hua Miao would collect enough money in the village to perform village sweeping. They first put up a straw pavilion in front of the tree god, in which incense and candles are lit, and led by the Kwei-shih each family would come forth to worship and make sacrifices of rice. After the ceremony is over, the gathering proceeds to a nearby river to dig up a few piculs of river sand, and thence to the mountain to gather a few dozen rattan vines. They twist the rice straw into ropes, on which they fly little colored pennants. Then the Kwei-shih would tie the ropes around the tree god, the earth god and the village god. Next he would visit every family in the village, holding a cock in one hand and dragging a dog with the other; he was followed by the villagers carrying sand and rattan vines. Reaching each house, Kwei-shih would circle around the hall with the cock and dog, and upon leaving, tie a rope on the gate. Sprinkling sand all around and shaking the rattan vines, the party would give a loud yell. When all the households are visited and serviced, the villagers would gather together outside the village, killing the chicken and dog and cooking them in a huge cauldron for a feast.

(B) Village Sweeping of the Ch'ing Miao. One of the days toward the end of the lunar New Year or in the second moon is set aside for village sweeping by the Ch'ing Miao. A few days before the event the village head who happens to

be in charge that year through a system of rotation would collect ten cents from each family for the purpose of purchasing chicken, duck, beancurd, paper money, incense, candles and colored paper. With the paper they make little triangular flags and stick them on the gate. The Kwei-shih would carry a long knife in the right hand and a dragon-head cane in the left, and followed by a man carrying a chicken and a duck, would descend upon each household, wielding the sword and shouting:

I come not your money to clear,
Nor your rice I level;
Surely I come not to take your lady dear,
But I sweep off the devil --
To the western area.

After the ceremony all family members crowd around the Kwei-shih as they move out of the village to a three-forked road in the west. Tossing the dragon-head cane onto the ground, the Kwei-shih burns it up with lighted papers and candles. Then, after killing the chicken and the duck, he sprinkles the blood on the road. The chicken and duck are cooked together with beancurd and other foodstuffs in a huge cauldron and eaten by the villagers on the roadside.

(8) The Chia Performance. When a person dies among the Hua Miao, the rest of the family would pray to him for their safety and health. If the years after his death prove prosperous to the family, then on passing the thirteenth year its members would perform Chia or the great Chai, involving the sacrifice of a buffalo in his memory. If at that time the family does not have the means to make a sacrifice, then the Kwei-shih may be invited to respectfully inform the deceased person of a postponement of the sacrificial date. Before performing Chia

767 the family must buy a buffalo way ahead of the date so that it can grow fat for the occasion. On the vacant ground outside the village a small straw pavilion is erected as the altar of sacrifice. The offspring of the deceased would lead the buffalo to the altar, and waving a large^a butcher's knife, shout several times: "Let no one rob our buffalo!" Inside the pavilion, incense and candles are lit and placed alongside such sacrificial items as chicken and duck. Standing beside the straw pavilion, the Kwei-shih would pray to the dead: "Your descendants so-and-so send you a buffalo and wish you would watch over them always." The man then brings the butcher's knife upon the buffalo's head. If the animal is killed with one stroke, then the greatest luck would attend the household. The head of the buffalo is placed in the pavilion as a sacrifice and the beef is cooked in a huge cauldron. Those friends and relations, who have come with five measures of rice and one jar of wine as gifts, now partake of the feast. After it is over, each one carries home three pieces of beef on a pointed bamboo stick.

751 (9) Hong Ma and Hong Pa. In the Miao-I
847 village one often sees abandoned butchered children lying around. The heads and legs of these dead children are severed with a kitchen knife by their own parents, the same knife thrown beside the body with blood strewn all over, - the whole presenting a gruesome spectacle. This happened because the dead child's parents had brought to this world several sons who had died of the same illness, and so they believed that an evil spirit must have possessed them and been reborn several times to "hong ma and hong pa" (to deceive the parents). Therefore, this child is now decapitated and slaughtered so that the headless and limbless spirit of vengeance would not be able to come to

the womb again. After this any child born is sure to grow into manhood. The decapitation and butchering have to be done before the child breathes his last. When the parents perceive that the illness of the child is identical to that of the other deceased children, /92/ they expect him to die, and taking advantage of his still being alive they cut off his head and legs. Otherwise, they believe, the prevention would not be effective. It is said that some ignorant Chinese in the same locality also follow this custom. 751/847

(10) Hair Preservation. When a child of the Miao-I is born the parents invariably ask a fortune-teller to outline his life's destiny. If his destiny is not good, then his hair is allowed to grow until he is six or twelve years old when he has his first haircut. The long unshaved hair is said to help preserve the life of the child. The first haircut is an occasion for great celebration: every household in the village would hang out red and green festoons and send greetings to the parents, who in turn would give a party, killing chicken and pig for a great feast. 787/852/856

(11) The Small Horse Image. If a child among the Ch'ing Miao cries all night without stop, the parents would attribute the cause of the trouble to the passing by of the "sky horse", a colloquial name for the locust. They would hang on the door a straw-wrapped bowl filled with rice and water, and little images of horses cut from the bark of a tree. This would stop the cry of the child. 735/753

(12) Throwing Water and Rice. When a Miao-I first becomes ill, the general assumption is that he has run into some starving ghost. The family immediately burns a bunch of unhusked rice and lights incense and candles in a bowl of rice immersed in water. This bowl is carried

755 outside the village, and its contents are strewn
753 on the ground. When the bowl is taken home and
the sick person is not yet well, then a Mi-la is
called in to drive away the hungry ghost by
prayer.

789 (13) Drawing a Cat. Because of the de-
struction by rats in the house, the Miao-I often
stick up a picture of a large cat on the wall to
scare away the rats. They claim this device is
very effective.

777 (14) The Auspicious Day. The Miao-I in the
hsien district do not consult an almanac but
consider as lucky any of the even days (2,4,6,8)
in the lunar calendar as well as the ch'en and
hsü days of the month. To ch'en belongs the
dragon and to hsü, the dog, both of which do not
have any taboo. So all the affairs of the Miao-
I are conducted on either the even days or the
dragon and dog days.

754 (15) Poisonous Insects and Medicines. It
is said that in the Miao villages in An-shun
certain women breed poisonous insects and cer-
tain men concoct medicines to harm people. Men
and women who acquire these poisons - women by
heredity and men through constant practice - are
subject to frequent attacks themselves, ailing
all over the body. So they have to eject their
poisons to hurt others. Sometimes when they
cannot harm human beings they can nevertheless
damage woods and stones, for if their poisons
are not ejected they themselves will be des-
troyed. This is a deep-rooted belief among the
754 Miao people. Each time an illness is prolonged
787 or becomes aggravated, the family suspects that
the sick person has been affected by poisonous
insects or medicines. In order to find out
whether the sick person has acquired any poison,
a test is made by placing at night a boiled egg
on the breast of the sick person or beside his
pillow. Next morning the egg is shelled and ex-

examinated. If the white of the egg shows a concave dent, then it is a proof of the existence of the poison. Thereupon the members of the sick person's family would shout curses outside the gate, so that the dispenser of the venom would come by himself or herself to get rid of it. Also there are cases where sick persons escape to other villages to avoid attack by these poisonous agents. We have closely investigated many areas but have not yet discovered a single instance of some one who actually possesses poisonous insects or medicines. This is after all pure superstition. But the Miao people believe in it strongly and take every precaution against it. A woman who is suspected of possessing poisonous insects may never expect to be married, and a man who is found to own such medicines is subject to lynching and expulsion. The belief of the I tribe in this connection is less deeply rooted than that of the Miao.

(16) Feng-shui. The Chung-chia in An-shun believe in Feng-shui /wind and water/ much more than the local Chinese. In the Chung-chia village there are one or two persons noted for their ability to divine Feng-shui such as in building a house and erecting grave mounds, the fortune of the offspring being dependent upon how these are located in relation to nature, mountain and river, and their shapes and conditions. It is further believed that the unusual rocks and overhanging cliffs as well as the green trees and gigantic vines in the mountains are endowed with the spiritual essence of the universe which serves to suppress the baleful vapors of the valleys and rivers. So even though it is known that a certain mountain yields valuable minerals, people will not mine them for fear of upsetting the stabilizing influence of these precious substances.

Of all the foregoing superstitions the

754
787787
823

OTU

070 Miao and the I people in An-shun not only dare not entertain any doubts and suspicions, but also refuse to let any other people to have different opinions. So, in the course of our investigations, we encountered innumerable difficulties. The writer has recorded only that which has been heard and said.

771, 1/13

Shan-Thai AL3
Chung-chia

[For data concerning religious beliefs and practices of the Chung-chia in the An-shun area, Kweichow, who have acculturated to neighboring Miao and Chinese, see 6: Ch-en, AE5 Miao, category 116. --Analyst]